T-shirt quilts aren’t hard to make, especially when you pre-sash the blocks. Preparation is key to ease of construction. A t-shirt quilt may be hung on a wall, used as a bedspread or loved to death in a college dorm – and years later. Preparation is the key in making these. Take your time, enjoy the process.

Once you’ve finished the first one, you may find they make wonderful gifts for others. They’re fairly simple and quick, and fun to give!

This tutorial will show you how I made mine. You can use these instructions to make your own. Please note: This tutorial is geared towards beginners!

Disclaimer & Copyright

There are many tutorials out there on t-shirt quilts. This is how I make mine. It works for me. **Please read through these instructions before beginning.**

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Basic Supplies

You will need few supplies other than your sewing machine, iron and ironing board to make a T-shirt quilt.

- Lightweight Fusible Interfacing (I use Pellon 906F, which can be obtained at any fabric store)
- Posterboard
- Pencil
- LongRuler & Yardstick
- Cutting board and rotary cutter
- Scrap fabric approx. 16” x 16”
- Fabric for sashing, border and binding
- Teflon pressing sheet (optional, but very helpful)

How big will my quilt be?

This is totally dependent on how big your T-shirt blocks are. A quilt made from baby shirts will be much smaller than one made from adult shirts. Once we determine how big your blocks will be, you can do the math to figure out how many shirts can fit into your quilt. You also have to decide if it will be a wall hanging, a lap quilt or a bed quilt.

Here’s the quilt I’m using for this sample. I’ll be demonstrating the calculations from this quilt.

1. Determining Block Size

Go through your t-shirts and find the one that has the widest logo, and the one that has the longest logo. You’ll use the largest length or width to size all the other shirts, depending on which is bigger.

For example, the top picture to the left shows my widest logo. It is 10” wide. Always round up to the next inch when determining block size.

The bottom picture shows my longest logo, which is 13” long.

Since 13” is the larger number, this is the one we’ll use. We will add one-inch to factor in seam allowance and a buffer so the letters don’t get sewn into the seam.

13 + 1 = 14. I will cut my blocks 14” square.

Don’t cut the shirts yet! We’ll do that later. First, we have to prepare the shirts for cutting.
Preparing the shirts

Wash all the t-shirts. No, I don’t care if they’re already clean. Wash them again! This time, **don’t add any fabric softener in the washer, or use fabric softener sheets.** Fabric softener is notorious for preventing total adhesion of the interfacing.

By the way, don’t try to get those stains out of the t-shirts either. They add character, and remind you (or the recipient) of the time they dropped the paint can and ruined the carpet – or spilled their martini in front of that really cute guy!

Press the Shirts

Notice I said **press,** not **iron.** There is a difference!! When you iron, you move the iron back and forth across the fabric. When you press, you lift the iron, move it to another area, and lay the iron on the fabric. **Press** the shirts.

You want to avoid stretching the knit fabric out of shape.

Here’s how I do it: Place the shirt with the logo side down. If there is printing on the front and back, lay a scrap piece of cotton fabric on the top of the logo that will be directly under the iron before pressing. Press with med-low to medium heat, and try to avoid pressing directly on any wording. You can also turn the shirts inside-out if desired. Be aware there is a chance of melting any lettering onto the right side of the shirt if you do this. Be sure to put a scrap of fabric between any lettering if you go this route!!

NOTE: Some logos are vinyl and will melt if pressed with an iron. You can usually spot a vinyl-type logo by the slightly raised, shiny lettering.

Cut the shirts apart

Cut the shirt up the side seams. Cut right along the seam line around the sleeve, across the top seam and around the collar.

Do NOT throw away the portion of the shirt you won’t be using. They may come in handy later.

*One good rule when quilting: Never, EVER throw anything away until you’ve completed your quilt. You’d be amazed at how many times you wish you had saved that one little scrap of fabric for those “accidents” we all have (i.e. cutting a strip too short, using it for your label, etc.).

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Now, go have a drink. You’re done with the prep work.
Let’s Calculate

Remember in school when you said, “I’ll never use this math!” HA! You’re gonna use it now, so let’s hope you were paying attention at least a little bit in class. And hopefully you’re not drunk after that martini.

First off, how many shirts do you have? You’ll want at least 12 for a wall hanging, more if you want a lap throw or bedspread. I tend to make lap throws – they get used more than bedspreads, or wall hangings.

Here’s a breakdown of standard sizes:

Wallhanging – usually less than 36”
Lap quilt – varies* – see below
Full-sized quilt – 80 x 88”
King-sized quilt – 104 x 93”

Crib quilt – 36 x 54”
Twin-sized quilt – 65 x 88”
Queen-sized quilt – 86 x 93”

* Lap quilts can be any size you want, typically between 52 x 52” to 68 x 78”. If you’re making it for a child, make it smaller. For an adult, make it larger.

Unless you have a penchant for self-destruction, and have a longarmer who can quilt the top once it’s done, I strongly suggest keeping the quilt twin sized or smaller. Dragging a huge quilt under a domestic sewing machine is murder.

We’ve calculated the size of blocks you will use when me measured them earlier. I’ll use my measurement of 14” as an example.

Our sashing (the fabric that will go around each square) will be 1” wide. Our border will be 3” wide.

If I use 3 shirts across and

Widthwise:
3 shirts x 14” = 60”
Sashing – 1” x 4 = 4”
Border – 3” x 2 = 6”
Total width of quilt 52”

Lengthwise:
5 shirts x 14” = 70
Sashing – 1” x 6 = 6”
Border - 3” x 2 = 6”

My quilt will be 52x82”. You can figure any size quilt with these calculations. Just remember to always add one more sashing than the number of blocks you’re using.
Ironing the Interfacing on the T-Shirts

First, you’ll need to calculate the amount of interfacing you’ll need:
Take the size block you’ll be using (in my case, 14 x 14”), and add 1-inch (15 x 15”). Multiply this by the number of shirts you have (15 for me).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interfacing size: 15”</th>
<th># of blocks: x15</th>
<th>Amount: 225”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divide this amount by 36 (one yard): 225 ÷ 36 = 6.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Round up to the nearest 1/8th yd if necessary)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to need 6.25 yards of interfacing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here’s a chart to show you yardage conversions.

Decimal to Yardage Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fraction</th>
<th>.125</th>
<th>.25</th>
<th>.375</th>
<th>.5</th>
<th>.625</th>
<th>.75</th>
<th>.875</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yardage</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>5/8</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cut this chart out and keep it somewhere. Trust me, you’re going to use it a lot.

Press Interfacing to Shirts

**Once again, I said press, not iron.** The iron is not a scrub brush. If you look like you’re scrubbing a pan while you’re doing this, you’re going to end up with a shirt that is all balled up and useless. If possible, use a Teflon pressing sheet. These sheets help keep vinyl logos from melting onto the ironing board (ask me how I know!)

Lay the shirt, face down, on the ironing board. **DO NOT STRETCH THE SHIRT.** If the logo looks skewed, gently adjust the shirt to straighten. Examine the back for stray threads and remove them. **Threads, especially on light colored shirts will show thorough once the interfacing is ironed on.**

Place the rough, dotty side of the interfacing down onto the shirt. Align it so the interfacing is just touching the bottom of the shirt collar. Touch down with a warm iron in several spots just to temporarily adhere it to the shirt.
The Secret to Good Adhesion

Iron-on interfacing is as finicky as a cat at his litterbox. Fusing isn’t difficult, but done incorrectly will result in the interfacing pulling away from the shirt the first time your wash it. Not a good thing.

Get a big pot filled with water. Take your scrap fabric, dip it and wring it out so it is damp, not soaking wet. Lay over the interfacing. With a medium-hot iron, press down firmly in the center of the scrap for 10 seconds. Lift your iron, slightly overlap where you just pressed, and repeat until the entire section of interfacing is fused. Let the fabric cool for a moment, and then check the bond. If you can see the “dots”, or it lifts up, repeat the press-lift-repeat process until all areas are fused. Typically, if the scrap fabric is dry, the interfacing has fused. Remember – do not slide the iron. Lift and press. Repeat for all shirts.

Creating a template

There are templates out on the market that have markings to enable your to center and cut your shirts quickly, but they’re expensive. Personally, I feel this money is better spent on more important necessities, such as putting a kid through college – or buying more fabric! I make my own template. First, cut a piece of posterboard exactly 4” larger than your block. My block is 14”, so I cut mine 18” square. Draw lines with a fine marker 2” in on the top and bottom. Then fill in the entire square with one” lines. These will help with centering the logo when you cut it out.

With a sharp blade, carefully cut along the 2” mark and remove the center section.

Mark the size in the corner. These can be used many times, and I’ve got one for about every size you can imagine!
Cutting Out the Shirts

Take a shirt and lay it on your cutting table. Place the template you just made on the shirt, with the top inside edge just below the collar stitching on the shirt. Take your long ruler and lay it across the bottom line of printing. Match it to the lines you’ve got drawn on your template. This will ensure the logo is straight across.

Square up the logo by measuring in on all sides. Find an area on the right and left sides, scooting the template and leaving the same amount of distance on the left and right. Again, use the lines you’ve drawn to make sure the shirt is straight. The top and bottom measurements are usually not the same because the logos aren’t the same size on all the shirts.

Mark each corner of the block with a pencil. Carefully remove the template. Do not move the shirt. Line your long ruler along the pencil marks and cut out with a rotary cutter. Repeat for all blocks.

Caution! This is what happens when you don’t fuse the interfacing completely. See how the seam has started to “wave”? This will cause the shirt to stretch and bunch when you try to apply the sashings. Take
Uh-oh, my shirt is too small!

It’s bound to happen with at least one of your shirts. After you cut off the sleeves, you find the corners don’t fit the template. It happens to me at least once a quilt. It’s easily fixed. (Of course, mine would be a beer t-shirt!)

PS: You can’t shortcut this by leaving the sleeves on before cutting the blocks. Because they’re sewn in an arc, the sleeve fabric will bunch when you try to iron on the interfacing.

Here’s how to do it:

1. Lay the ruler across the top of the shirt just above the collar line
2. Cut off the area above the collar
3. Fold the shirt in half

4. Align your ruler at the edge of the sleeve hole
5. Cut off the excess fabric
6. Open the shirt

7. Take the shirt back (which you did save, didn’t you?) and interface a 7” section. Cut it out.
8. Lay the interfaced section along the cut section of your shirt block
9. Sew it to the shirt

10. Fold the new section out to be sure you added enough fabric. If not, rip it out and try again.
11. Trim off the excess fabric
12. Press the seam towards the sleeve. Repeat on other sleeve.
How To Make A T-Shirt Quilt

Part 2

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This quilt will have two colors of fabric to buy – one color for the sashing and binding, one color for the border. The colors you choose are totally up to you. Here are a few ideas:

- If it’s a graduation quilt, use school colors
- For a baby quilt use the colors of the nursery, or bright colors for a floor quilt that the baby can play on
- Use the décor colors for a quilt that will be used in a certain room
- Take two colors from the t-shirt logos

Here’s a couple of tips:

- Try not to match the sashing fabric to the shirts themselves. This will result in blocks that will look as though there is no sashing around them at all.
- Solid or mottled tone-on-tone prints work best. Loud prints or colors can be fun, but be aware that they can also be distracting. Your eye will instinctively go to those instead of the t-shirt blocks you’ve worked so hard to cut out. These would be great for the back of the quilt though!
- Don’t fret too much over these choices. It’s pretty hard to mess this up. Just pick two colors you like! Think spring or fall colors. The colors of your garden. There are so many choices. Have fun with it! You can see from my samples above that I’ve used all different kinds of solids and patterns.
How much fabric do I buy?

I’m going to make this easy for you. No math involved.

Buy 1.5 yards of fabric for the sashing and binding, and 1 yard for the border for a quilt twin-sized or smaller. Yes, you may have some left over, but there’s no harm in that. You’ll have a little extra in case of that “oops” cut, and you can add it to your stash! Or use it to make a pillow to match your quilt. Besides, you saved lots of money using t-shirts instead of buying fabric for your blocks.

Wash your fabrics

You may be tempted to skip this step, but consider this first: The t-shirts you’re using have probably been washed hundreds of times. They’re not going to shrink. However, new fabric WILL shrink the first time it’s washed because it’s 100% cotton – some cottons shrink 10% or more! You don’t want to pull your new quilt out of the dryer and find the sashings and borders have pulled up, while the t-shirt blocks have stayed the same size. In quilting, it’s either pre-shrink everything or nothing at all.

Another consideration is colorfast concerns. Many fabrics (especially reds and dark colors) will bleed on their first washing. Better to find this out before you sew them on your quilt, than when your white blocks turn pink! To check that your fabrics are colorfast and won’t run, try this old quilters trick: Rub a damp, light-colored towel over your fabric. If the color from your fabric rubs off on it, trust me, it’s going to run in your quilt!

Prepare your machine

Wind at least 2-3 bobbins of neutral thread to use. There is nothing worse than having to stop and rewind a bobbin in the middle of a project! I normally use a medium grey for t-shirt quilts, as it is perfect for light or dark t-shirts.

The seam allowance

Quilts are done using a ¼” seam allowance. If you don’t have a ¼” machine foot, you can easily configure your needle to the correct gauge by using an index card. I’ve got instructions for this on our blog. Just go here:

http://www.seamstobeyouandme.com/2012/02/09/how-to-get-a-perfect-14-seam/

Precision-seaming is all-important when quilting. It can mean the difference between a square quilt or a skewed quilt. Be diligent in sewing your seams correctly!!
Cutting the Sashing Strips

We’re going to pre-sash the blocks. This makes it much easier to match up all your blocks when you sew them together. We’ll be sewing them in an L shape, like the block on the left. I’m using a grey mottled fabric I had in my stash.

All sashing strips will be cut 1½ wide for this quilt. Only the length will differ. This will give you a 1” wide strip in-between each block after it’s sewn. Of course, you can use whatever width you choose. But this is the measurement we’ll be using for this quilt.

The Horizontal Strips

It’ll be best to cut the strips as you need them. First, we’re going to do the strips along the top and bottom. I’ve colored them in yellow in the picture.

Look at the picture of the quilt you took. Count the number of squares you have, and add the number of blocks on the bottom row of your layout:

Number of blocks: 15
Bottom row: 3
Total # of sashing strips: 18

Fabric is normally 42-45” wide. Mine is 44”. Let’s figure out how many strips of 1½ “ fabric I’ll need:

44 ÷ 14 = 3.1 So I can get 3 14” sashing strips from each 43” strip of fabric. How many 44” strips do I need?

18 ÷ 3 = 6 I’ll need 6 strips of 44” fabric.

So, I will cut 6 strips of fabric, and cut 3-14” sashings from each strip.

How many strips do YOU need?

Line up your strips on the cutting board. Use your rotary cutter and ruler to slice the number of strips you’ll need.
Sewing the strips: The horizontal rows

Sew one strip along the TOP of each t-shirt block.

Sew an additional strip along the BOTTOM of each t-shirt block that you are using on the bottom row only.

Now, lay your blocks back out on the floor in their correct order. Step back and take a look. Hey! It’s starting to look like a quilt!

Are you getting a “thread nest” or jamming when you begin sewing? Try holding the top and bobbin threads with your finger as you start to sew. This keeps the top thread from pulling into the bobbin case!

If you notice your sashing strips are stretching as you sew, try putting the strip on the bottom and the shirt on top when you sew.
The vertical strips

Your vertical strips should be the length of your block (14” for me) plus 1” (for the horizontal sashing you added, minus the seam allowance). This would be 15” for me. What are yours? We’re going to cut enough for all the blocks EXCEPT the bottom row because we added a horizontal top and bottom strip for those. We’ll do those later.

Since I’ve got 4 rows above the bottom row, I’m going to cut a total of 16 sashing strips, each 15” long. Sew one to the LEFT side of each block.

Your block should look like this, with a sashing strip on the top and on the left.

Now add a strip to the RIGHT side of all the blocks on the far right-hand side of your quilt.

The vertical strips – the bottom row

Since the blocks on the bottom row have a sashing strip on both the top and bottom, the sashing will be a different size. This sashing should be the size of your block (14” for me) plus 2” (for the horizontal sashings you’ve done). That’s 16” for me. What size do you need?

Add these sashing the same way as above – one on the LEFT of every block, and one extra on the right to the far right block.

You’re done with the sashings!
Lay them all out and it REALLY looks like a quilt now!!

Let’s celebrate - we’re in the home stretch!

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Sew the blocks together by row

We’re going to sew the blocks together row-by-row, and then sew the rows together. Watch to be sure you’re sewing the correct sides of the blocks. Make it easy on yourself – collect only one row at a time to ensure you’re sewing the right blocks together!

Take one horizontal row of blocks to the sewing table. Lay them side-by-side in the finished configuration. Sew two blocks together, matching the edges, and make you’re sewing the correct side. Press the seam to set the stitches (trust me, this makes a difference when pressing the seam open), then open and press the seam towards the sashing. Add the next block, and press in the same manner, towards the sashing.

Once you’ve finished this row, collect another row of blocks and continue until all horizontal rows are sewn.

Sew the horizontal rows together

Sewing the rows together calls for attention to matching seams. Because we’ve presashed the blocks, matching the seams will guarantee the blocks are straight and true overall. Take the time to match the seams, and your quilt will be perfectly square!

Matching seams

On the next page I will show you how to match the two seams you will encounter when sewing the rows together. Pin each seam as you match it.

Remember: Never, ever, ever sew over a pin! If your needle hits the pin, it will not only break your needle, but can cause hundreds of dollars in damage to your beloved sewing machine. Pull pins out as you come to them!
There are two seams you will encounter on each row that must be matched:

Seams that “butt” together:

You’ll notice in this picture that the seams are pressed in opposite directions. These seams will butt together nicely. Place a pin on each side of the butt to ensure the seam will stay butted and not move when you sew it.

Seams that lie on top of each other:

These seams are both pressed in the same direction. Lay the seams directly on top of each other. Pin right along that seamline.

How I sew: I always use a walking foot when sewing the rows together. A walking foot keeps the two layers from shifting. Although I don’t do it anymore, pinning along the seamline is a great idea for beginners!

Sew the rows together

Put the first row on top of the second row, right sides together. Match all seams and sew this row. Press the seam flat, then open and press the seam towards the sashing. Put the third row on top of the second row, matching the seams, sewing, and pressing as instructed above. Repeat for all remaining rows.

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Adding the border

This is the final step in creating your quilt! We will add a border around all 4 sides of the quilt. The strips for the border will be cut 3 ½” from your border fabric for this quilt. Once again, you can make it any size you want, but this is the size used for this quilt.

How to measure for the borders

You will measure your quilt both vertically and horizontally the same way. We’ll put the vertical borders on first. Lay your quilt out flat, carefully smoothing (without stretching!) and making sure it lays perfectly flat and square.

Take your measuring tape and measure the length of your quilt, from top to bottom, in at least two places. Hopefully the measurements are pretty darn close to the same in both areas!

What happens if they’re not? Well, you’ve learned the lesson on why we’re so adamant about using precise ¼” seams. In the end, it’s important. Even a little thing like failing to press the seams flat before you press them open can cause this. To get your quilt “back to square”, divide the difference and this is the measurement you’ll use. For example, if one side is 74” and the other side is 75”, you’ll use 74.5”. You’ll have to work in each side so they match that 74.5” border piece.

Mine was 74 vertically.

Miter your border pieces

Chances are your borders are going to be longer than the standard size of fabric. This means you’ll have to piece your borders to get the correct length. Since mine is 74” long I will require two lengths of 3.5” fabric x the width of the fabric (normally about 44”) for each side, so I’ll cut four strips 3.5” wide by 44” long. We’re going to miter these pieces together for a stronger seamline.

1. Take one length and place it horizontally face-up on the cutting mat. Take another length and place it vertically, face-down over that fabric. You might want to cut off those white “selvage” ends so they don’t end up showing in your border. If you don’t cut them off, make sure your ends overlap enough (as shown in the picture) so the selvages aren’t sewn into the seamline.

2. Draw a line from the bottom left to the top right of the fabric. The line should create an invisible “A” on the fabric.

3. Pin along the line and take to the sewing machine.
4. Sew along the line
5. Trim ¼” from the line
6. Press the line
7. Open and press flat

Now trim this piece to the length you need. I trimmed mine to the length I measured - 74”. From my picture, you can see why using a non-directional fabric can be helpful. My seam didn’t line up well with the pattern in the fabric. Since this quilt is for me, I’m not worried about it. But were I making it for someone else, I would have corrected this!

Sew the border on the quilt top

Place the border, face down, on your quilt. Pin it well, matching edges and corners. Sew this border on. Press it flat, then open and press the seam towards the border. Repeat for the other side.

Sew the border with your walking foot, again using a ¼” seam. The walking foot will help keep your top and bottom layers from shifting.

Adding the horizontal border

You’re going to do the exact same thing as the vertical border:

• Measure the width of the quilt in two places (including the border) to determine the length of the vertical border.
• Cut your strips, miter them and cut them to the correct length.
• Lay them, face down, on the quilt top, pin, and sew.
• Press seam towards the border.

YOU’RE DONE!! Pat yourself on the back!!

Now you’ll need to put a batting, backing and binding on it. There are many great tutorials out there that will show you how to do this:

http://www.allpeoplequilt.com/techniques/finishing/quilt-layers_1.html

http://www.quiltuniversity.com/batting_a_quilt.htm

We hope you’ve enjoyed this tutorial and would love to hear your opinions and see your pictures if you do make one!